

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Milton Ranch Stock Water Pipeline Installation
Proposed Implementation Date:	May 2023
Proponent:	Milton Ranch – Lessee
Location:	SE4 of Section 2, Township 9 North, Range 26 East (Common Schools Trust)
County:	Musselshell

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The Milton Ranch is proposing the installation of a seasonal 880-yard underground stock water pipeline across the SE4 of Section 2, Township 9 North, Range 26 East. The majority of pipeline will be trenched along an existing overhead electric power line with no stock water tanks being placed on state land. (See attached map)

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) Southern Land Office, and Milton Ranch – Lessee of State Grazing Lease #6094, are involved in this project.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

No other governmental agencies have jurisdiction over this proposal.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – The DNRC does not grant permission to Milton Ranch to install a stock water pipeline in the above-described tract.

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – The DNRC does grant permission to Milton Ranch to install a stock water pipeline in the above-described tract.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

There are no fragile or unstable soils present in the area of the proposed pipeline installation. The soils consist of sandy loam soils. The installation site was planned to avoid unstable areas. Once construction is finished, the affected area will be reseeded with native grasses to reduce erosion. Various pipelines in the area show that with post installation reclamation, these soils are capable of handling such an action.

No significant adverse impacts to the soils are anticipated.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

The proposed pipeline would not affect groundwater, ambient water quality standards, and drinking water contaminants or degrade water quality. Installation of the stock water pipeline would help distribute the availability of water across the SE4 of Section 2 in hopes to better distribute livestock grazing.

No significant adverse impacts to water quality, quantity, or distribution are anticipated.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

Dirt work may generate some airborne dust. These activities will minimally affect air quality for a very limited amount of time.

No significant adverse impacts to air quality are anticipated.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

Vegetation in the area of the proposed improvements consists of the following native and introduced species: Western Wheatgrass, Bluebunch Wheatgrass, Crested Wheatgrass, Green Needlegrass, Needle & Thread, Blue Grama, Sandberg Bluegrass, Prairie Junegrass, Threadleaf Sedge, Various Forbs, and Cheatgrass. Ponderosa Pine and Juniper species are in the area.

The pipeline route is planned to avoid unstable areas. Once construction is finished, the affected area will be reseeded with native grasses to reduce erosion. Various pipelines in the area show that with post installation reclamation, these soils are capable of handling such an action.

No significant adverse impacts to vegetation cover are anticipated.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

Local wildlife may be displaced during construction for a very short period of time. Once construction has finished, the area will be available for use by local wildlife once again. The proposed improvements, once installed, are not anticipated to significantly impact their habitat or movement throughout the tract.

No significant adverse impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats are anticipated.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

The Species of Concern Report from the Montana Natural Heritage Program indicates that the and the Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), Brewer's Sparrow (*Spizella breweri*), Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*), Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*), Mountain Plover (*Charadrius montanus*), Shestnus-collared Longspur (*Calcarius ornatus*), and Thick-billed Longspur (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) may occur within a mile of the SE4 of Section 2. However, these species have not been observed within the project boundaries.

The tract described above is Core Sage Grouse Habitat. The project has been submitted, reviewed, and approved to move forward by the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program. No evidence of Sage Grouse activity noted during the February 21, 2023 site visit.

No significant adverse impacts are anticipated.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

The DNRC archaeologist conducted a Class III cultural and paleontological resources inventory of the area of potential effect (APE). No cultural or paleontologic resources were identified in the APE. As such, proposed developments will have *No Effect* to *Antiquities* as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. A formal report of findings has been prepared and is on file with the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

No significant adverse impacts are anticipated.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

The project is located away from any adjoining county roads and will not significantly impact the aesthetics of the local region. Stock water tanks and underground pipelines are common in the area as agriculture is a common practice in Musselshell County.

No adverse impacts are anticipated.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

No demands on limited resources are required for this project.

No adverse impacts are anticipated.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

There are no other projects or plans being considered on the tracts listed on this EA.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>RESOURCES</i> potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.• <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS</i> following each resource heading.• Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present. |
|---|

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

There are some human safety risks associated with operating equipment. The proponent and their employees accept these risks as acceptable occupational hazards.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The project will not alter any current use patterns dealing with agricultural use. Livestock grazing would continue as before, with possible better distribution of grazing pressure due to the better availability of water. No stock tanks will be placed on state land, making this project only for an underground stock water pipeline through state land in the SE4 of section 2.

No adverse impacts to agriculture activities are anticipated.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

The proposed activity will not create, move or eliminate any jobs. No new jobs will be created.

No adverse impacts to the employment market are anticipated.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

There are no direct or cumulative effects to taxes or revenue for the proposed project.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

There will be no increases in traffic, no changes in traffic patterns, and no need for additional fire protection, or police services.

No adverse impacts to government services are anticipated.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

There are no zoning or other agency management plans affecting these lands.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

No adverse impacts to the recreational value are anticipated.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

The proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments.

No adverse impacts to population or housing are anticipated.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposal.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:


How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The proposed project will have no effect on any unique quality of the area.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

Monetary return of \$500/term to the trust is anticipated.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Zach Huyser Title: Land Use Specialist
Signature: 	Date: 5/8/2023

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

I have selected the Proposed Alternative B, and recommend that permission be granted to Milton Ranch to install a stock water pipeline in the above-described tract.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:


I have evaluated the potential environment effects and have determined that no significant adverse environmental impacts will result from the proposed activity.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐ EIS

☐ More Detailed EA

☒ No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Jeff Bollman Title: Southern Land Office Area Manager
Signature: 	Date: 8 May 2023

